

## Several Issues on the Study of Anning River National Corridor

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### Abstract

Anning River Basin, located in the southwest of Sichuan, is a very important national corridor, and its most prominent feature is the multi-ethnic interaction as well as the resulting cultural integration and cultural diversity. On the basis of the existing relevant research, the study on this area is carried out from the ethnic interaction and cultural development as well as their relevance, which has important academic value and practical significance. There are three aspects of issues worth noting: first, the formation and evolution of ethnic pattern; second, cultural partition; third, ethnic interaction and cultural change.

**Key words:** Anning river; National corridor; Culture; Ethnic interaction

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### INTRODUCTION

Anning River, known as "Sun Water" in ancient times, originates from Pusagang of Xiaoxiangling Mountains in the northern part of Mianning County of Sichuan

Province, and passes through Mianning, Xichang, Johnson and other counties of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture as well as the Yanbian, Miyi and other counties of Panzihua (some tributaries come from Xide and Huili County), converging with Yalong River in Deshi Town of Miyi County and then flowing to the Jinsha River. Anning River is one of the largest tributaries on the downstream left bank of Yalong River, with a total length of 352 km and the basin area of 11,200 square kilometers, running from north to south. Its terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast. Surrounded by mountains, the high mountains, valleys, plains, basins, hills are intertwined here. There is diverse ecological environment, and many ancient ethnic groups migrated and moved to live and multiply on this land. Anning River is an important national corridor in western China.

### 1. STUDY ON ANNING RIVER NATIONAL CORRIDOR IN NEARLY HUNDRED YEARS

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Western scholars, explorers, missionaries and so forth entered the Anning River Basin for investigation and travel. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese scholar Yang Chengzhi, Ma Changshou, Lin Yaohua, Zeng Zhaolun and so forth have access to Liangshan for a study. Although they mainly investigated and studied Liangshan Yi nationality, they also involved the ethnic groups and historical culture of Anning River Basin. In the 1960s, to solve the "west" ethnic identification problems, relevant experts of Sichuan Province went to Anning River Valley, and investigated the Duoxu, Arz, Namuyi, Paimuyi and other ethnic groups, forming a group of investigation report with higher value.

In the early 1980s, Southwest China Association of Ethnology organized a "comprehensive investigation of six river basins". Li Shaoming, Tong Enzheng, He

Yaohua and so forth led the Yalong River expedition to focus on the investigation of the Anning River Basin, and their results are concentrated and published in *Ethnic Investigation Report of Yalong River Basin* (Li, 2008). After this investigation, Meng (1990), Li (1984), He (1985), Long et al. (1991) also published a number of research results from the ethnic history of the Anning River Basin. CASS famous linguist Sun Hongkai and so forth launched a preliminary investigation and research on some of the endangered languages of the region, with which as the main basis, they proposed “Qiangic languages” concept, resulting in extensive and far-reaching impact on the study of the Tibeto-Burman languages (Sun, 1983). From the late 1980s, European and American scholars re-entered the Anning River Valley, represented by the professor of anthropology at the University of Washington, Steven Harrell’s study on the ethnic identity of Anning River Yi branch and other issues (Harrell, 2000), as well as the surveys of Japanese and French linguists for Duoxu language culture. Over the past decade, along with the booming study on the Tibetan-Yi corridor, academia’s concern for the Anning River Basin located in the Southeast of the Tibetan-Yi Corridor has also increased, such as Yang (2006) introduces “Na Ethnic Groups” concept and relevant discussion, Yuan (2010) researches on ethnic identity and ethnic relations of Duoxu Tibetans (Yuan, 2010), Li (2011) studies on the social and cultural aspects of, Wu Da’s research on the ethnic identity of Er-su Tibetans (Wu, 2006) and so on.

Overall, although some progress has been made on the ethnology and anthropology studies of Anning River national corridor, there are still some of the following questions:

(a) Focusing on micro case studies, the meso and macro research in the Anning River Basin as ethnic and cultural regional unit is still rare, and comprehensive and systematic study is yet to be born. This shows that the academic community has not yet fully aware of the value of the presence of the Anning River national corridor, and failed to consider the region as a relatively independent regional research unit.

(b) There are three obvious tendencies or deficiencies. The first is focusing on the study of some Tibetan ethnic groups in the Anning River Basin, particularly focusing on identity study of Duoxu Er-su and other ethnic groups. There are less research achievements about Yi, Mongolian, Dai, Hui and other ethnic groups, while the research achievements of Han which plays an important role in the multi-ethnic group interaction, multi-cultural integration and coexistence system of Anning River Basin are even as sparse as the morning stars. Second, from a regional point of view, there are more studies on the upstream region, and few studies of the downstream region, while research results of the middle area are very rare, showing extreme imbalance. Third, the subjects of studies focus on the nationality, historical origin, languages of single ethnic

group and reality-based ethnic identity. The research on the frequent and complicated ethnic interaction, relevant cultural exchange and other major issues is yet to be launched, and in particular, the interactive relationship among Tibetan, Yi, Han, Hui and other nationalities still lacks the necessary attention.

## 2. VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF LAUNCHING THE STUDY ON THE ANNING RIVER NATIONAL CORRIDOR

The national corridor, proposed by Chinese ethnology circle since the early 1980s, is an ecological concept of national cultural relation considering both the regional history and national relation pattern, and usually refers to the natural geographic corridor with some kind or multiple long-term national movements. It is generally believed that there are three important national corridors in China from the perspective of historical evolution, namely, the Hexi Corridor, Tibetan-Yi Corridor and Nanling Corridor, of which the Tibetan-Yi Corridor is the most typical. The so-called Tibetan-Yi Corridor, also known as “Hengduan Mountain National Corridor” or “Western China National Corridor”, refers to the connected regions stretch from the Loess Plateau of Gansu and Qinghai in the north and Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Tibet, Yunnan and other provinces (regions) of Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau in the south. Nujiang River, Lantsang, Jinsha River, Yalong River, Dadu River, Minjiang River and other great rivers flow through the region from north to south, creating a number of natural valley channels. Thus, this region becomes a historical and geographical fields for many ancient nationalities to travel both north and south, and migrate, and is an important channel for the communication between all ethnic groups in the northwest and southwest and even between the north and south China (Shi, 2014). Anning River Basin is not only an important part of the Tibetan-Yi Corridor, but also self forms a national corridor due to its unique geography, ecological environment as well as historical and cultural characteristics.

The human civilization of Anning River Basin has a very long history, while there has long been migratory movement of nationalities. From as early as 4,500 years ago to the Qin and Han dynasties, foreign cultures have entered this area, which has been demonstrated by the archaeological culture institute in recent years (Jiang, 2007). In Han Dynasty, a lot of ancient ethnic groups represented by Qiongren were active in the Anning River Basin. Here is not only a key area for Han Empire to pioneer the frontiers and expand the land, but also an important part of “Western Sichuan Road” of the Southwest Silk Road. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Tibetan Empire, rising in the Tibetan Plateau, expanded east, gradually entered the Anning River Basin, and fight

against Tang Dynasty and Nanzhao here, so that part of the population in this area tend to “Tebetan”. In Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasty, this area is located on the Southwest official road. As a result, the northern nomadic people represented by the Mongol Nationality re-entered the Anning River Basin in a large scale, and frequently interacted with the local population, while Han, Hui and other ethnic groups also migrated to this area in a large number. There are nearly two million population in the Anning River Basin, including Han, Tibetan, Yi, Hui, Miao, Dai, Lisu, Bai, Mongolian, Naxi and other long-dwelling nationalities, among which, there are many ethnic groups with very unique characteristics in terms of historical culture, such as Duoxu, Niru, Er-su, Namuyi, Paimuyi, Muya and so on. Yi distinguishes the “paddy field”, “low dam” and “high dam”, and other groups such as “Yala”, “Abu”, “Tazhi” and “Niluo” are yet to be identified. Different ethnic cultures touch, influence each other, borrow from each other, acculturate and integrate with each other here. Anning River Basin not only has to highlight cultural diversity, but also retains a large number of very ancient cultural relics. For example, the region of Duoxu, Er-su, Namuyi and other groups in the upstream still keeps a lot of precious relics of primitive religious cultural belief, which is undoubtedly of great significance for the academia to conduct the study on early religious cultural patterns of Tibetan Plateau and its surrounding areas.

In summary, no matter from the history or reality, the most important feature of the Anning River Basin is the multi-ethnic interaction as well as the resulting cultural blend and diversity. Based on academic development trends, launching studies on the ethnology and anthropology of the Anning River Basin from the aspect of ethnic group interaction, cultural development and their relevance undoubtedly has important academic value and practical significance.

Firstly, the distribution pattern of multinational and multi-ethnic group as well as the history, current status, regional cultural characteristics and development trend of the ethnic relations can be fully revealed, thus promoting the study on national corridor to develop deeply, which also has significant reference value to dealing with the actual inter-ethnic and cultural relations in this region.

Secondly, the Anning River national corridor is not only the area multi-nations and multi-ethnic groups being distributed, where the inter-ethnic relations are complicated. It is more of an especially important contact and transition zone of ethnic culture region of Han, Yi, Zang and so forth, and has a special importance in the pattern of Chinese ethnic relations. The relationship between Han, Yi, Tibetan, Hui and other nationalities not only affects the national unity, social stability and harmonious development of the region, but also possibly have a impact of considerable degree on the ethnic

relations and social stability in southwest and western China.

Thirdly, the Anning River national corridor is a special sedimentary belt of ancient culture, where there are rich natural mineral resources and abundant ethnic cultural resources. But as it is located on the eastern margin of the Hengduan Mountains, its ecological environment is fragile, and the contradiction between the economic development and the protection of ecological environment has become increasingly acute in recent years. As a result, how to explore, utilize and protect the rich and unique ethnic cultural resources in the social and economic development has become an inevitable and urgent choice. However, due to the cultural complexity, there is a lot of confusion and problems to be solved in the selection and positioning of the development, inheriting of ethnic culture as well as the combination with the tourism economy, and in facing the ethnic culture during the modernization and urbanization—especially in the change and adjustment of traditional culture of many ethnic groups with less population in the basin. Studying the cultural issue from the ethnic interaction, namely, the source of culture, to reveal the intrinsic relationship structure and evolution laws of the culture in the region has important practical significance to the protection, exploration and utilization of local ethnic cultural resources as well as the establishment of new sustainable economic and cultural model.

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### 3. THREE NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS OF ISSUES ON ANNING RIVER NATIONAL CORRIDOR

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The study on the ethnology and anthropology of the Anning River national corridor from the perspective of ethnic interaction and cultural development and their relationship should, based on sorting out the history of multiethnic interaction of the Anning River Basin, primarily reveal the formation and evolution process of the ethnic group distribution pattern in the region, carry out a comprehensive and systematic study on the ethnic interaction and cultural development of the Anning River Basin from the synchronic and diachronic perspective, make an accurate assessment of the status of ethnic relations and cultural development of the Anning River Basin, and reveals its future development trend. Specifically, the following three aspects are of particular noteworthy.

#### 3.1 Formation and Evolution of Multi-Ethnic Distribution Pattern

The Anning River Basin shall be examined as a regional ethnic and cultural entity to systematically sort out ethnic origins and evolution path of the regional multi-culture of the Anning River Basin, thus providing a basic coordinate system to recognize ethnic interaction and cultural

development of the region. The historical features of the Anning River national corridor shall be outlined, and the ethnic interaction and cultural developments in the history of the Anning River Basin shall be focused on, roughly including the aspects as follows:

- (a) With the analysis of archaeological culture as the center, the exploration of the early human activities of the origin of civilization in the Anning River Basin.
- (b) Activities of Shu people migrating southward during the Qin Dynasty and Southwest Yi, Qiang and other ethnic groups in the Anning River Basin as well as the entering of the Han culture and other issues.
- (c) The sea-saw fights of the Tang Dynasty, Tibetan, Nanzhao in the Anning River Basin in the 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century AD as well as its impact on regional ethnic pattern.
- (d) The impact of two Song dynasties and Dali regime on the ethnic interaction of the Anning River Basin, the entering of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the radiation into the national culture of the region.
- (e) The Mongolian's down south in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, the migration of Han, Hui and other nationalities as well as their impacts on the ethnic distribution pattern of the region.
- (f) The influence of Han pouring into the region during the Qing Dynasty, Yi moving towards northwest, and Bai, Dai, Miao, Lisu and other ethnic groups moving northward on the evolution of ethnic distribution pattern of the Anning River Basin;
- (g) The basic structure of the ethnic group pattern of the Anning River Basin in modern times.

### 3.2 Study on Cultural Division

The cultural regional pattern and appearance of the Anning River national corridor shall be represented to reveal the differences and characteristics of the downstream, midstream and upstream cultural area of the Anning River. The cultural section in the Anning River Basin shall be divided and studied by zones with different factors as markers, so as to explore some important junction between some ethnic groups and cultural intersects, and discover some key points and lines between the ethnic groups and culture, which has crucial significance to revealing and illustrating the ethnic interaction, the history and status of cultural development, the relationship between the geographical environment and culture, culture's adaption to the environment and other issues of the Anning River Basin.

### 3.3 Ethnic Interaction and Cultural Change

On the basis of the case survey, the specific situation of the ethnic interaction of the Anning River Basin is

revealed from the microscopic perspective to show how different ethnic groups uptake and influence each other and coexist in harmony in the culture; and explore some regular connection between the ethnic interaction and cultural change and development. The joint part of different ethnic groups with typical significance shall be selected from the upstream, midstream and downstream region for the investigation to show the specific situation and details of ethnic interaction and cultural development vividly from the perspective of individual case, and reveal the ethnic group and cultural characteristics of multi-component mutual interaction of this region, promoting the study of the Anning River national corridor to be more detailed and specific. Meanwhile, the adjustment and protection of ethnic culture, especially the rich study and protection of intangible cultural heritage and other issues in the economic and social development, in particular the new urbanization process in recent years should be more focused on.

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## CONCLUSION

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The Anning River Basin, as one of quite important national corridors in Southwest China, is characterized by prominent multi-ethnic interaction and the resulting cultural integration and cultural diversity no matter in history or reality. At present, it particularly needs to be based on the development trend of China's southwest regional research, and look at the transformation and development of economic society, the inherit and innovation of traditional culture and other actual demands, and carry out systematic and in-depth studies on the Anning River national corridor from the ethnic interaction, cultural development as well as the relevance between them with the focus on corresponding to the formation, evolution, cultural partitions, ethnic interaction, cultural change and other issues of the ethnic group pattern of Anning River Basin.

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